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ABSTRACT

The role of the university in moral and value issues are discussed in a 1987 inaugural address by the president of Indiana University. He suggests that a college education should include values through both intellectual inquiry and example. Liberty to speak and write is an essential value if faculty and students are to achieve their academic missions. The freedom of the university ensures that many approaches to moral tenets may be tested. A key value at the university is the morality of reason that requires examination of issues to help avoid prejudice. An important dimension of what students learn is a process of self-examination through rational inquiry. The morality of respect and belief in the worth of each individual is linked to the concept of equal opportunity. The moralities of reason and respect must be joined by a morality that recognizes the importance of learning for its own sake and for the sake of the learner. Colleges also provide a forum for public inquiry on key public policy issues. Appreciation of the arts has a special place at Indiana University. Leadership qualities of university presidents that affect the development of values are also considered. (SW)

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EDUCATION and VALUES

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Inaugural Address of
Thomas Ehrlich
as the Fifteenth President of
Indiana University

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October 12, 1987

EDUCATION and VALUES

Today is the celebration of an institution, not an individual. Nevertheless, I hope you will bear with a personal reflection on education and values. We are in a time when the roots of individual morality are strained, in a climate of moral uncertainty. It is worth inquiring what roles a university can have in reinforcing the roots, in clearing the climate.

This country does not lack claimants that higher education is shortchanging youth by failing to impart basic values. Critics on both public and private platforms have decried what they perceive as American moral decay and have laid the blame at our chalk-covered feet. A frequent response has been that if students do not leave high school with a sound set of values, properly nurtured, those values will not be developed in a university. Family, religion, and prior schooling are the settings, those respondents claim, where individual values are permanently shaped. There is something to this response, I think, but not everything. My own experiences, both in and out of the classroom, convince me that a university education can and should include values, not through inculcation but through both intellectual inquiry and example.

It is risky business to comment on issues of values, but I know of no more important questions facing institutions of higher education. I take the risk with the realization that those issues will not be resolved at once or for all time. Rather they are for each generation to confront anew, learning from the past while recognizing that the search for a return to an earlier era is almost always nostalgia for a time that never was.

In this light it may be comforting to remember that just a half century ago, the great sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd revisited Muncie, Indiana, which they called Middletown, and reported that, "According to the early American tradition, the schools served as an extension and transmitter of the values upon which parents, teachers, religious and civic leaders were in substantial agreement. But during recent decades—as home, church and community have each become in themselves areas of confused alternatives . . . Middletown schools have become by quiet steps increasingly an area of conflict. . . ."

First and most important, liberty to speak and write is an essential value if faculty and students of the University are to achieve their academic missions. A university has no place for absolutes; it calls for constant questioning and re-examination, always with an open mind. In the terms of my mentor, Learned Hand, almost a half-century ago, "The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right . . . ." That spirit is at the heart of the freedom that inheres in a great university, and it

is no less needed for a society. The morality of freedom—or the spirit of liberty, as Judge Hand called it—is a value that can be taught in many different ways, by abstract concepts and analysis of specific situations. This freedom is threatening only to those who insist that values be taught their way. The freedom of the university ensures that many approaches to every moral tenet will be tested, and that both the legitimacy and the limitations of any particular approach will emerge, if not today then tomorrow.

A university can also educate about other values and epitomize those values as an institution. I suggest two by way of prime example—reason and respect. History suggests that no community can maintain an environment of liberty without an environment of mutual respect, and that both are needed to allow the exercise of reason to flourish.

My views are shaped by my past, by alternating experiences in the public and the private sectors. The more recent private positions were in universities—first Stanford and then Pennsylvania. At both, the primary goals were the highest levels of teaching and research. These goals were always sought, but never fully achieved. Better education and better scholarship were always possible. Those two private positions bracketed two public ones—providing legal services to poor people in this country and allocating foreign aid to poor people in Third World nations. In both public roles, the primary goal was equality—a goal also always sought, but never fully attained. My aim in both positions was to help ensure that poverty not preclude a level of equality in access to basic needs.

The dichotomy between public and private should not be overdrawn. Private universities have important programs that promote equality of opportunity. Programs of legal services for the poor and of foreign aid seek excellence. But the centers of gravity are distinct.

The last half decade in this country has been marked by intense debate between advocates of these two goals—excellence and equality—in our public schools, from primary grades through the college years. The President's National Commission on Excellence in Education decried what it termed "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." The Commission found that Americans had undermined excellence in the search for equal opportunity. The National Coalition of Advocates for Students, on the other hand, affirmed the centrality of equality as a guiding principle of American education. The Coalition urged "that excellence without equality is both impractical and incompatible with the goals of a democratic society."

The special challenge to Indiana University and other great public institutions of higher education is to ensure that the tension inherent in the two aims of excellence and equality is a creative tension, not a divisive one. Both are essential; they must flourish together. With each objective comes not only an institutional obligation, but also a dimension of individual morality that can be taught to university students. Academic excellence requires what I term the morality of reason, while the aim of equality is based on the morality of respect. Respect for reason and the reasons for respect are not, of course, the only important moral concepts that our University can impart to students or that it can epitomize as an institution. Justice and beneficence are among the others. But reason and respect will serve to underscore my point.

The morality of reason requires us to examine an issue, to break it into its component parts, to analyze each of those parts, and then to reconstruct them through careful consideration of premise and conclusion. That difficult, sometimes tedious, process is imperfect in even the most rational among us. But it has the extraordinarily important virtue of not permitting appeals to prejudice. To put the matter more positively, it has the saving grace of requiring that all conclusions rooted in emotion be recognized for what they are.

This standard of morality demands reasoned analysis of problems, full development of those analyses, and honest recognition of the limits of rational exploration. Every student comes to the University with conceptions and preconceptions. How could it be otherwise? Here we are required to state our premises, why we have chosen them, and the reasoning processes by which we move from premise to conclusion. These are modes of inquiry that can be taught. Methodologies differ from discipline to discipline. Indeed, a major benefit of requiring a liberal education in diverse fields is that each has its own set of lenses through which to examine and evaluate evidence. While no discipline has a single correct angle of vision, a combination can provide the perspectives needed to reason—to weigh and measure, to judge and evaluate evidence in arriving at considered judgments.

Students here gain enormous quantities of information. But the sum of that information, for even the brightest, is only a tiny fraction of the world's knowledge, and much of that fraction, in a factual sense, may prove to be wrong or at least irrelevant before even the first class reunion. The most important dimension of what our students learn, therefore, is not information but a process of self-education through rational inquiry. It is developing the integrity of an inquiring mind that

is open, searching, probing, but never certain. It is making reasoned decisions, based on considered judgments, while recognizing the surrounding uncertainties.

The morality of respect has the same relation to equality as the morality of reason has to academic excellence. The worth of each individual is the premise for the morality of respect. Reason precludes appeals to bigotry, but the best traditions of Indiana and our country require more than tolerance. At the University, as in each community throughout our State, we depend on trust and civility. The morality of respect means that it is the responsibility of each person to respect the personal dignity of others. The community of Indiana University can and should insist on that respect by every member. Time and again I have seen that while expected standards are not always met, expectations must be clearly stated, or they certainly will not be realized. In the words of a wise educator, John Gardner, "High performance takes place in a framework of high expectations."

Indiana University cannot achieve the utopian dreams of New Harmony in terms of conduct or misconduct, any more than in social or economic terms. But it can encourage understanding of, and appreciation for, diversity. The University is a superb training ground, for its community is strikingly diverse. Students come from many different backgrounds and include different races, religions, sexual orientations, and ethnic ancestries. Learning not just to live with but to delight in differences, as well as similarities, is an important dimension of university education, though it should begin long before and continue for a lifetime.

The moralities of reason and respect must be joined by what I call the morality of learning—a morality that recognizes the importance of learning for its own sake and for the sake of the learner. I am troubled, however, that so much of the public scene is portrayed by the media primarily for purposes of amusement rather than understanding. The realms of the arts and of public-policy debate are both illustrative.

Performances of music and exhibits of paintings are generally reviewed by the media under the label "entertainment," and are considered in the same fashion by their readers, viewers, and listeners. By contrast, the arts are an integral part of public life throughout Europe and South America. The arts bring pleasure and wonderment to viewers and listeners. But they bring more. Each of the visual and performing arts provides its own prism through which the artist sees the world; audiences, in turn, gain insight and understanding as well as pleasure.

Universities have an obligation to educate students in the arts. Here at Indiana University students have special opportunities to grasp their value. We have the finest music school of any university and strong programs in other arts. Each can enhance listeners and observers as well as performers when they are linked together by common bonds of learning.

The arts provide an important dimension in education that is so obvious it is sometimes ignored. In considering that most elusive of all human traits—creativity—the arts forge unique links between rational analysis and intuitive insight. With experience and knowledge, our perceptions and abilities to make critical judgments become sharpened and educated, and our lives enriched. We develop our abilities to see and to hear, to discern the meaning and quality of what we see and hear, and then to experience and improve our surroundings.

Beauty may be in the eye or ear of the beholder or listener, but that eye and ear can be educated—must be educated if they are to serve their users well. We often know what we like, but the experience of coming to like what we know is an exhilarating educational undertaking. It involves dimensions of both the social sciences and the humanities in understanding the history and background of a work of art and its place in the development of a particular school of ballet, music, opera, painting, or sculpture. But it is the education of the mind that disciplines and opens the eye and ear to recognize the beauty that artistic talent can convey, the appreciation of the transformation of insights from the artist's imagination into something tangible. Some students come with natural talent, others with only interest, but all can be educated if they have the will to learn and the courage to inquire.

There are many marks of a civilized person. Appreciation of great art is not the only one, but it is one that has a special place of honor at this University. A large neon sign used to stand at the back of one of my favorite secondhand bookstores proclaiming "Art Illuminates Life." And so it does.

Turning from the arts to issues of public policy, we seem in danger of losing patience with debate on those issues when they cannot be neatly packaged as entertainment. In this bicentennial year, it is worth recalling that *The Federalist* was printed in newspapers and pamphlets to persuade a doubting public why the proposed new Constitution should be adopted. Perhaps not all who obtained those newspapers and pamphlets read, let alone understood, *The Federalist*. But it is a sophisticated analysis written for audiences who cared about major issues of the time.

Today, the larger questions of how and how well our democratic government functions seem to be drowning in gossip. The point is not that we want public officials or their relatives to misbehave in private—naturally we do not. Rather, I am concerned that such misbehavior swallows up the larger issues of public policy in a competitive compulsion to seek a laugh or a leer. Paradoxically, as technology has enabled instant communication with more and more millions of people, we seem less and less able to know how to focus on serious and complex problems of public policy. Those problems are increasingly lost in a sea of junk. I am not against entertainment; far from it. But we need serious analyses and discussion of the major public agenda, not low-level Punch and Judy shows.

Universities cannot alone solve this concern. Yet they are a major forum—perhaps *the* major forum—for public inquiry on key issues of our time. Universities are a prime arena where questions involving the roles of the President and Congress in foreign affairs, the obligations of our government to poor people, and other major policy questions can be seriously discussed. It is most important that universities not take sides as institutions on those issues, but rather ensure open and extended debate, free of interference. Indiana University, at each of its campuses, can and should serve that role. It can expect audiences from among its students only if we are also able to educate them to appreciate that not everything that should be learned needs to be entertaining or resolvable within sixty minutes, less time for commercials. We must be able to engage the interests and intellects of our students because of the inherent importance of the matters they study, not because their teachers are show people—though all of us who are teachers know there must be some dimension of theatre in every classroom. If we succeed well in this undertaking, our students will be much more likely to demand and engage in serious debate on public issues.

It has become uncommon, if not unfashionable, to think that one human being can make a difference in nursing, in music, in business, in the Peace Corps, in law, or in scores of other fields. Yet that is precisely what I believe because I have seen it happen over and over again. Thousands of individual women and men with whom I have worked—in legal aid for poor people in this country, in development aid for poor people abroad, and in universities across the nation—make a difference. They know that ambition and integrity are not inconsistent virtues. They combine intellectual training and moral commitment to do something with their lives that is worth doing—that makes a difference. Both training and commitment are needed; and the combination is unbeatable.

No university provides courses in commitment, though the commitment of teachers can be instruction by example at its best. Through strong training and commitment, there must emerge those outstanding individuals who are willing and able to move into public life when the need arises. It is particularly the responsibility of our faculty to preserve and transmit—as well as help to shape—our values in ways that ensure those individuals will step forward when they are needed. Not all of us can be Cincinnatus, who put aside his plow and took up the public burden, but all of us who are trained in a university can be educated to understand the fragility of our system and the importance of a personal involvement when it is needed.

Universities have not always served this role. Many ran for cover during the McCarthy era, disgracing themselves in the process. The inability of the German universities in the 1930s to stand their ground was a far worse example—with far worse consequences. But universities are, in my view, a best hope of our society.

What can one university president do to affect the development of values? I am tempted to say not much, reflecting on my own limitations. But I could not close without underscoring the examples of my predecessors. The benefits of John Ryan's leadership surround us. His extraordinary efforts to enhance the University's academic ties around the world are a prime example. It may be too soon to take the full measure of his achievements, yet I am clear that he was a remarkable president and it is my good fortune to succeed him. The contributions of Elvis Stahr, Jr., are also present everywhere around us, and we salute him.

Let me focus briefly on two other presidents who set the marks for what superb institutional architects can do. The first is David Starr Jordan, for whose memory I have special affection, since he was the first president of Stanford University as well as a great leader of Indiana University. Imagine that outstanding scientist, a scholar of evolution, traveling through this State a century ago, talking about the development of animals, fish, and humans, based on rational inquiry. Imagine that 33-year-old president establishing electives in a previously required curriculum. Listen to his words. "The duty of real teachers," he wrote, "is to adapt the work to the student, not the student to the work. Higher education should thus foster divergence instead of conformity, its function being not to bring us to a predetermined standard, but to help each to make the best of inborn talents. A prearranged course of study is . . . the acme of educational laziness." At the same time, President Jordan

supported significant commonality in undergraduate education. "The chief merit of the classical course," as he put it, was "that it had backbone."

Above all, David Starr Jordan stood firm in his attention to the moralities of reason, of respect, and of learning. "We may teach the value of truth to our students," he said in his Stanford inaugural, "by showing that we value it ourselves. In like measure, the like value of right living can be taught by right examples." Though I cannot hope to emulate his leadership, I will remember his wisdom.

The other great president whom I view with awe, of course, is Herman B Wells. Among the giants in higher education, he was and is the head of the class. Imagine a university leader in the depression who was convinced that music and the other performing arts were essential to a civilization, not merely entertainment, and was willing to put his entire presidency where his convictions were. Great musicians and artists built their departments, not Herman B Wells. But he made it all possible.

Many here remember firsthand the caring strengths of his leadership. Those of us less fortunate have his presence today and his wonderful autobiography, *Being Lucky*. Recall his advice to a new president: "The central administration," he said, "should be a place to see how it can be done rather than why it cannot be done." "Next to proliferation," he called uniformity "the greatest enemy of distinction—uniformity of treatment of departments, of individuals, and of subject matters. They are not of equal quality, and to try to treat them all precisely alike is a great mistake." "The faculty and students," he urged, "are the most effective public relations representatives of the University. When they believe in their institution, they will tell the world of their enthusiasm." Finally, I remember his counsel: "Professional longevity is essential. You can't win any institutional battles out of office."

I come to Indiana University with great admiration for its past and great expectations for its future. It is a living landmark of the vitality of federalism in our State, even more than our highways or airports. It belongs to all the people of Indiana, and is their major vehicle for the transition of Hoosier youth from adolescence to responsible citizenry. The University has special opportunities and obligations. I will seek to make the most of them.

More than a quarter century ago, my wife, Ellen, and I returned to live in the Midwest, where she was born. Since then we have moved to the East, to the West, and back again to the East. Now, and finally, we are home in Indiana.

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